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SUBJECT: CANADA FACILITATES ISRAELI-PALESTINIAN ARCHIVAL COOPERATION

1. (SBU) Summary: Canadian, Israeli, Palestinian, and U.S. archivists have agreed to five joint archival projects, subject to formal approval of a new Memorandum of Understanding. The focus will be on surveying and digitizing records currently in Israel that document the "shared legacy" of the Jewish Israeli and Palestinian peoples. The Palestinian representative, however, warned that Palestinian authorities may not approve the MOU until they regain access to the Orient House. End summary.

PROJECTS WILL DIGITIZE RECORDS INACCESSIBLE TO PALESTINIANS

2. (SBU) At the conclusion of a two-day series of meetings in Ottawa, leading archivists from Israel, the Palestinian territories, Canada, and the U.S. on June 11 agreed to a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) on five potential joint archival projects, which would focus on surveying and digitizing archival records in Israel that document the shared history of the Jewish Israeli and Palestinian peoples. Pending formal approvals of the MOU, the projects -- under the framework of the International Council on Archives with the name the "Israel and Palestine National Archives Collaboration" -- would:

- place under archival control, digitally reproduce, and make available newspapers published in Palestine during and prior to 1948;
- survey and digitize photographs documenting the pre-1948 cultural life of Mandatory Palestine;
- survey and digitize records from the British mandate and Ottoman period located in the Israel State Archives;
- form a team of experts to inspect and inventory the records taken from the Orient House in August 2001; and,
- set up records management and archival training programs for the Palestine National Archives and the Israel State Archives.

ORIENT HOUSE CONTROVERSY ALMOST DERAILS MEETING

3. (SBU) The Palestinian representatives insisted throughout the meeting that they needed guaranteed access to the Orient House, the former PLO headquarters in Jerusalem that Israeli troops have controlled since 2001. According to the Palestinian delegation, "thousands" of Palestinian archives that the Israelis had "confiscated" remain inside. The Palestinian delegation stated that the U.S. and Israel had both agreed at the Annapolis summit to reopen all Palestinian institutions, including the Orient House, but claimed that Israel had failed to follow through on its commitment. After much debate, all parties agreed to continue efforts to re-open the Orient House, while focusing on small projects first. A Palestinian archivist nonetheless warned that Palestinian authorities might not sign the MOU until resolution of this issue.

COMMENT

4. (SBU) This meeting was another concrete example of the ability of the U.S. and Canada to work together to facilitate joint projects

between the Israelis and Palestinians to advance the interests of  
peace in the Middle East.  
WILKINS